

CHAPTER 2

Local Context

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1983 Park Grand Opening Poster and Brochures



LOCATION AND REGIONAL CONTEXT

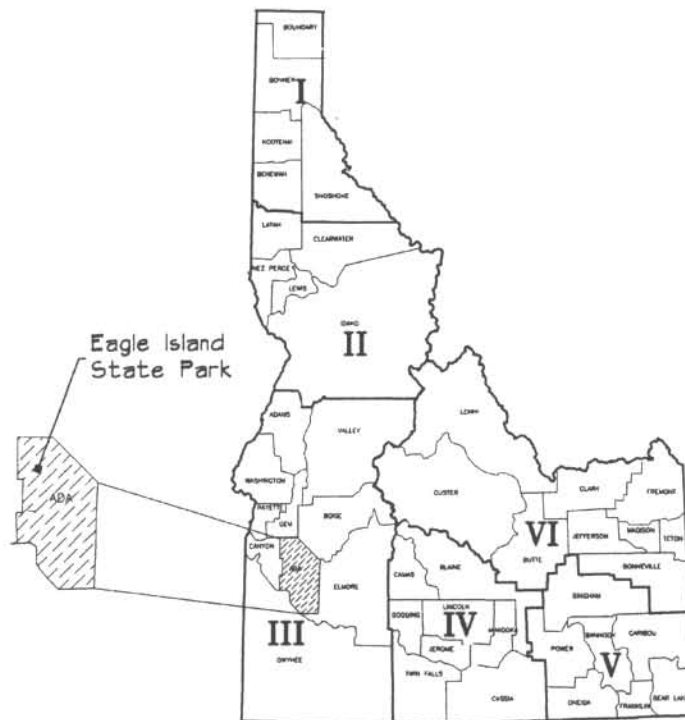
Eagle Island State Park is located on the Boise River, ten miles northwest of Boise City in northwestern Ada County. The city of Boise and surrounding Ada County, located in southwestern Idaho, encompass the population, business and governmental centers of the state. The majority of the county's population is in Boise, the state capital and county seat.

The landscape of northwestern Ada County is influenced by both its natural history and man's past and present use of the land. The gently sloping floor of the Boise River Valley and the foothills of the Boise Front dominate the physiographic character of northwestern Ada County. Water captured from the bordering mountain watershed, and the rich alluvial valley soils help make agriculture one of the county's largest industries. A large portion of the land in this part of the county historically and currently has been used for agriculture. Agricultural lands however are rapidly being converted to urban and suburban land use.

The 546-acre Eagle Island State Park is rural in character. The park is located at the western end of Eagle Island and is bordered on the north and south by the Boise River. It is situated in and surrounded by low, flat agricultural land—primarily irrigated crop and pasture land to the east and west. The farms range in size from five to several

hundred acres.

Urban and suburban developments are quickly encroaching on this pastoral setting. To the east, a new golf course development is being built. On the south and north, across the channels of the Boise River, mostly up-scale developments with large homes on large lots are being built on former agricultural land.



Map 2.1

To the west, adjacent to the park, the Idaho Department of Fish and Wildlife operates a fish hatchery, and numerous homes and a mobile home park have been built.

History

The State Board of Prison Commissioners originally purchased the Eagle Island State Park site in 1929 for \$72,000. The acreage was to be used as a state prison farm and to be administered as a minimum-security institution. The intent of the institution was to:

1. Provide occupational experience to the inmates.



2. Grow enough foodstuff to supply the Eagle Island Prison Farm and to supplement the Idaho State Penitentiary's food supply.

3. Provide additional income to the state through the sale of surplus food.

The land was first used for grazing by cattle and hogs. During the first few years of operation, much time and money was put into clearing and leveling the land to make it tillable. Attempts to raise enough grain and hay to support the livestock failed, as did attempts to raise vegetables. Cultivation of the ground was unsuccessful due to the gravelly subsoil.

Many structures were constructed to accommodate the increasing needs of the farm. Cow barns, hog and chicken houses and granaries aided in establishing the institution as a working farm. Support buildings like the superintendent's house and the dormitory made the farm a year-round operation.

In 1946, the Army Corps of Engineers designed a dike for the south bank of the north channel of the Boise River. The inmates performed most of the work on the dike including earth moving and installing rip-rap. This dike proved to be valuable in protecting farm buildings from floodwaters.

The prison farm at Eagle Island was controversial throughout its history. Much criticism came from within the prison system. S.M. Poarch, acting warden, in 1944 suggested that Eagle Island was "actually a white elephant and should be disposed of."

In the biennium report of 1944 it was written that costly improvements to the land had not been sufficient to grow grain and hay for the livestock. Consequently, the author felt that too much money had been wasted on the farm operations and the property should be sold.

"It would seem sensible to sell the Eagle Island property, even though it is

not worth half what has already been spent on it. There is no use in continuing to throw good money after bad. The selling price would probably bring enough to pay for some fertile land elsewhere . . ."

Biennium Report 1944

The Board of Prison Commissioners did not follow this advice and operations continued until February 1977. In March 1977, the Idaho Department of Corrections turned over the penitentiary honor farm to the Idaho Department of Lands. In February 1978, the Idaho Land Board voted to set aside the Eagle Island property for development as a state park. The property, designated Eagle Island State Park, is now under management of the Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation (IDPR, Eagle Island General Development Plan, 1980).

PARK-COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIP

There are few regularly scheduled events at Eagle Island State Park. In the fall, after the Park has closed to the public, it has been the site of high school cross-country meets. In 1999, the Park for the first time was the site of a college cross-country event. The Bob Furman Invitational meet for high school cross-country teams has attracted the greatest number of participants. In September 1999, about 3,000 people came in 650 cars and 29 buses for the one-day event.

The park facilities were open for the event, including the concession stand. Portable toilets were brought in and overflow parking between the entry station and the parking lots and swimming area was required.

Two other Idaho state parks host cross-country events – Hells Gate near Lewiston and Farragut near Athol.



In the early summer of 1999, a Boy Scout group was granted use of the area between the entry station and the developed park area for a camp out. There are more requests for scout camp outs than have been granted in the recent past.

Park staff will make special arrangements for field trips, fitness hikes or other group uses. Ranger supervision is required for these types of special events which use the undeveloped portion of the park.

There are no other scheduled community or regional events. Family groups and corporations may reserve a shelter for day use such as reunions or picnics.

A non-profit group is working to complete the greenbelt along the Boise River from Lucky Peak reservoir to Eagle Island State Park. This group, the Foundation for Ada/Canyon Trail Systems (FACTS), has acquired easements to bring the trail as far west as Eagle Road. FACTS also is working on linking trails and pathways from the west, in Canyon County, to Eagle Island State Park, thus making the park a hub of recreation trail activities.

EAGLE ISLAND STATE PARK CHRONOLOGY

1811. Pacific Fur Company expedition, the Astorians, explore the Snake River Valley on their way to the Columbia River. Led by Wilson P. Hunt, the westward journey discovers the Boise Valley.

1864. T.C. Catlin stakes out a homestead that includes Eagle Island State Park property and secures water right number 4 on the Boise River.

October 1929. State Board of Prisons purchases Eagle Island property from Karl Fischer of Eagle, for \$72,000, for use as a prison honor farm.

March 1930. Eagle Island Prison Farm begins operations with 40 trustees. Carlton B. Holt is appointed to the position of

superintendent.

1930. Dairy barns and milking parlor built from plans by Superintendent Holt and the University of Idaho. Original bunkhouse and dining hall/kitchen completed.

1937-1939. Eagle Island Fish Hatchery, operated by the Idaho Department of Fish and Game, begins operation.

1944. Biennium Report to the Idaho State Legislature recommends disposing of the Eagle Island Honor Farm property, "The selling price would probably bring enough to pay for some fertile land elsewhere..."

1946. US Army Corps of Engineers designs, and inmates build, dikes along south bank of north channel of the Boise River to protect the farm buildings from flooding.

1949. Dormitory built by prison labor for \$29,000.

1965. Idaho State Legislature enacted enabling legislation, creating the Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation (IDPR).

1965. Slaughterhouse is built.

1971. City of Eagle is incorporated.

1977. Idaho Department of Corrections discontinues operation of Eagle Island Honor Farm and turns over the property to the Idaho Department of Lands.

1977. Idaho Land Board votes to set aside Eagle Island property for development as a state park.

1980. Mike Harned appointed Manager of Eagle Island State Park, in addition to Lucky Peak and Veterans Memorial State Park.

November 1980. IDPR Board approves Eagle Island State Park General Development Plan.

August 1981. Conditional Use Permit 81-12-CU approved by Ada County for development of Eagle Island State Park

June 1983. Eagle Island State Park dedicated June 25. Approximately 26 acres developed with water slide, picnic areas, restrooms, concession and swimming area.



1989. IDPR leases agricultural land within the park boundaries. Lease expires December 31, 2004.



Cows grazing along the southern boundary of Eagle Island State Park.

November 1995. IDPR purchases 7.3 acres from Ron and Sharon Taylor and purchases 5 acres from Wes Laurence to provide access from Highway 44.

December 1996. IDPR sells 28.4 acres to Ron and Sharon Taylor.

April 1996. Pete Ostwinkle appointed Manager of Eagle Island State Park.

May 1996. Conditional Use Permit 96-26-CU approved by Ada County for gravel pit and crushing operation at the proposed new entrance and bridge on Highway 44 across the north channel of the Boise River.

January 1997. IDPR purchases an additional 6.59 acres from Wes Laurence.

January 1998. Mike Harned reappointed Manager of Eagle Island State Park.

1998. Agreement signed with the Ada County Highway District and the Idaho Transportation Department for Eagle Island State Park to be used by the transportation agencies for wetlands mitigation land. Wetlands mitigation project started.

1998. Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Tourism Plan completed.

May 1999. Ron Vigil appointed manager of Eagle Island State Park.

September 1999. IDPR contracts with Beck & Baird to update the Eagle Island master plan.

December 15, 1999. Planning Review Team at Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation headquarters to identify and prioritize issues related to park development and to select Citizen Advisory Committee.

January 18, 2000. Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) Orientation at Eagle Public Library.

January 25, 2000. Public Input Workshops at the Eagle Public Library to identify and prioritize issues related to future development of the park.

February 10, 2000. Staff Workshop at the Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation headquarters to identify and prioritize issues related to future development of the park.

March 23, 2000. Planning Review Team meeting at the Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation headquarters to develop mission and vision statements and to refine master plan goals.

March 30, 2000. Citizen Advisory Committee tour of Eagle Island State Park.

April 11, 2000. Joint Planning Review Team and Citizen Advisory Committee at South Region Office to review problem statements and to select preferred alternatives.

May 6, 2000. Joint Planning Review Team and Citizen Advisory Committee at Eagle Island State Park to continue selection of preferred alternatives.

May 18, 2000. Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation Board Meeting at the Herrett Center, Twin Falls. The Board approves



the draft master plan for Eagle Island State Park.

July 11, 2000. Public Open Houses at the Eagle Public Library to review and comment on the draft master plan.

July 24, 2000. Review of draft master plan and conditional use permit with Ada County Development Services.

August 28, 2000. Presentation of the draft master plan to the Treasure Valley Partnership meeting at Eagle Island State Park.

August 31, 2000. Presentation of the plan during a workshop of the Ada County Planning and Zoning Commission.

September 20, 2000. Presentation of the master plan to the City of Eagle Parks and Pathways Committee.

October 7, 2000. Walking tour of the old prison farm by the Eagle Historical Society.



Swim beach and picnic area.

